

Introduction¹

1.0 Scope and Purpose

Holly Springs, North Carolina is a rapidly growing community due to its proximity to Raleigh and the Research Triangle Park (RTP). A town of 1,000 people in 1990, the population grew to more than 9,000 in 2000 and sits at over 18,000 people in 2006. This tremendous growth has meant many changes for Holly Springs with rapidly increased residential and facility development. The Town of Holly Springs faces the challenge of promoting sustainable growth, providing necessary resources to new residents, while still striving to keep its strong “small community feel.” The development of a Pedestrian Plan comes at the right time to help guide Holly Springs in providing a safe, connected, pedestrian-friendly community.

The planning study area covers the Holly Springs corporate limits and the ETJ which encompasses about 15 square miles. Because the Town is expanding outwards, it is important to maintain and develop a connected pedestrian network keeping transportation and recreational trips possible by foot. While the Town is still relatively small, connectivity of pedestrian facilities is still an achievable goal when building upon the existing pedestrian facilities.

While walking is the least expensive and for some, the only transportation mode, implementing, building, and maintaining a high quality pedestrian system requires comprehensive planning and long term funding. This Pedestrian Transportation Plan will be a key resource for the Town in securing grants from a growing supply of funds dedicated to pedestrian safety and livable communities.

The Plan seeks to address retrofitting pedestrian facilities where connectivity is lacking and also provide sound policy and ordinance recommendations to ensure future pedestrian-friendly growth. It addresses all users from children to seniors and seeks to provide pedestrian accessibility to multiple land uses including schools, residential areas, commercial areas, trip attractors, and Downtown.



Figure 1(a): The Village District is the central focus point in the Town of Holly Springs and is an important pedestrian hub.

This document presents the findings of a public input process along with an assessment of existing pedestrian facilities in Holly Springs. From these findings, a set of phased recommendations have been developed for a pedestrian system that meets the future needs of area's residents. These recommendations include an integration of both on-road and off-road pedestrian facilities along with improved roadway crossings. The recommendations include both physical changes and policy changes to help guide pedestrian-friendly growth. The Plan also provides program recommendations to promote walking and funding sources to facilitate the Plan's implementation.

1.1 Benefits of a Walkable Holly Springs



Figure 1(b): Walking has many proven benefits. A comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, and functional pedestrian system will promote walking as an important health and wellness activity in Holly Springs.

Communities across the United States have been implementing strategies to improve their walking environments and serve the needs of pedestrians. This is done not only to promote public safety, health and welfare, but also because of the growing awareness of the multiple benefits of walking. These benefits include alternative transportation options, increased health and fitness, lower levels of traffic congestion, environmental benefits, economic benefits, and an increased sense of community among residents.

Transportation Benefits

Walking is the most inexpensive and broadly accessible form of transportation. People engage in multiple walking trips everyday, mostly by necessity, to get from place to place. In 1995, the National Personal Transportation Survey found that roughly 40% of all trips taken are less than 2 miles. By making these short trips on foot, rather than a car, citizens can have a substantial impact on local traffic and congestion. Additionally, many people do not have access to a vehicle or license and simply cannot afford other modes of transportation. In an auto-dependent environment, this situation leaves the elderly, the young, and the underprivileged without a means to get around for even basic daily trips. An improved pedestrian network provides greater and safer mobility for all residents, and allows for equity and a more productive community overall.

Increasingly, citizens believe that access to alternative means of transportation and access to quality recreational opportunities such as parks, trails, greenways, and bicycle routes, are important factors for them in determining their overall pleasure with their community. Walkable places can help build a sense of community as well by encouraging residents to get outside and increase

social interaction. Sidewalks and greenways ideally function as positive places to meet, play, live, work, and shop. Happy, active citizens radiate a high degree of livability within a community and this livability factor can, as mentioned above, attract new businesses, new residents, and new opportunities - all important components of maintaining a high quality of life in the community.

Personal Health

It is well documented that an active community is a healthy community. There are numerous studies affirming that sedentary lives and prolonged periods of inactivity are major deterrents to health, sometimes doubling the risk of morbidity and mortality from coronary heart disease and stroke¹. Obesity and diabetes, particularly in children, have risen dramatically in recent years. In fact, the U.S. has obesity prevalence rates of 20% or greater². The U.S. Department of Health now recommends 60 minutes of physical activity every day to maintain body weight. Improving the connections between schools and neighborhoods in the Town of Holly Springs can positively influence children's health by providing opportunities to further incorporate exercise into their daily lives.

Overall, the rise in the occurrence of obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers affecting all ages are clearly linked to lack of physical activity. A safe, walkable community provides a means and facility to pursue exercise and improve health for all.

Environmental Improvements

Having adequate pedestrian facilities helps to reduce dependence on automobile travel which improves air quality. When people choose to get out of their cars and make trips by foot, they make a positive environmental impact. They reduce their use and dependence on gasoline and reduce the volume of air pollutants. According to the EPA there is strong evidence that reducing air pollution from automobile use can protect children's health³. For example, during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, when driving was reduced and ambient ozone levels fell by 27.9 percent, emergency room visits for asthma dropped by 41.6 percent. These results suggest that while pedestrians are improving their own health through physical activity, they are also improving the health of those around them by not contributing to air pollution with their automobile trips. Other impacts can be a reduction in overall neighborhood noise levels and improvements in local water quality as fewer automobile-related discharges wind up in the local rivers, streams, and lakes.



Figure 1(c): Pedestrian-friendly area in front of Town Hall.

Greenways help protect and preserve important natural landscapes, linking fragmented habitats and providing wildlife corridors. They enhance water quality by providing natural buffer zones that protect water bodies from runoff. Air quality is improved by protecting the plants that naturally create oxygen and filter out air pollutants. They also encourage interaction between humans and their environment and provide a means for environmental education.

Economic Benefits

A pedestrian friendly city can help both the individual and the community economically. Walking is a free means of transportation. The cost of owning and operating a car with surging gas prices is a significant percentage of our incomes. Walking is a necessity for some and a financial gain for all. A walkable community is also a sign of high quality of life, attracting new residents and businesses, and spurring economic development.



Figure 1(d): By protecting natural landscapes, wildlife populations will flourish. Shown here, a frog searches for cover along the Middle Creek Greenway, near residential construction.

Summary and Additional Resources

Many private and public organizations have completed studies and surveys that show the many benefits of walking. The ideas presented above are only a small sample of the information that is available. If you would like to learn more about the benefits of walking, the Internet can be a great source of information. An excellent starting-point for resources is the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center's website (www.walkinginfo.org/pp/benefits), based out of Chapel Hill, NC. Another excellent resource is Active Living by Design, (www.activelivingbydesign.org), a program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and part of the UNC School of Public Health, also in Chapel Hill, NC.

1.2 Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives were generated for the Town of Holly Springs in 2006 from Steering Committee representatives and public participants. These goals provided an overall guide for developing the Pedestrian Plan. They are a combination of overall goals for the Town of Holly Springs and for the Pedestrian Plan itself. Taken together, they helped to form the vision statement.

- Improve connectivity across Town by filling sidewalk gaps and connecting different land uses through an integrated combination of sidewalks, greenways, and safe roadway crossings

- Promote safe walking in Holly Springs for all types of residents and promote the safe interaction between motorists and pedestrians
- Focus on improving pedestrian safety near schools, commercial areas, major corridors, and Downtown
- Develop off-road greenways that protect the environment, provide recreational opportunities, and connect into the on-road sidewalk system
- Improve unsafe intersections and crossings
- Integrate pedestrian network with surrounding communities and regional trail systems
- Provide for senior and disabled accessibility
- Determine key pedestrian issues in Holly Springs
- Prioritize pedestrian needs and projects
- Develop a Plan that is integrated with other existing and future Town of Holly Springs plans
- Develop policies and ordinances to guide pedestrian-friendly growth
- Provide funding opportunities to guide Holly Springs in future implementation

1.3 Plan Components

This Plan document includes the following major components:

This **Introduction** that presents the mission, goals, planning process, and guiding principles of this Plan along with the benefits of a walkable town (Chapter 1).

An assessment of **Existing Conditions** that overviews existing pedestrian conditions, land use, trip attractors, and also summarizes existing related plans of Holly Springs (Chapter 2).

A recommended **Pedestrian Network** that puts forward a framework of recommended facilities (pedestrian corridors, intersection improvement projects, and greenways) (Chapter 3).

Program Recommendations for education, encouragement, and enforcement and **Policy Review and Recommendations** (Chapter 4).



Figure 1(e): Citizen participation at one of two public workshops.

Implementation recommendations that outline specific steps for achieving the plan's key elements including phasing and prioritization of the Pedestrian Network (Chapter 5).

Design Guidelines to guide the Town of Holly Springs in current facility design and standards (Chapter 6).

Appendices that provide a summary of public input, the prioritization matrix, cost estimates for the Pedestrian Network, and funding recommendations.

Footnotes

¹ Fox, Dr.. Kenneth R. *The Influence of physical activity on Mental Well-Being*.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (2003). *Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting*.